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New York

*President:* Mr. Eliasson ..... (Sweden)

*In the absence of the President, Mr. Poukré-Kono (Central African Republic), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

*The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.*

**Agenda items 17 and 73 (*continued*)**

**The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security**

**Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance**

**(e) Emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and reconstruction in war-stricken Afghanistan**

**Report of the Secretary-General (A/60/224)**

**Draft resolution (A/60/L.27)**

**Mr. Ilkin** (Turkey): Turkey has already aligned itself with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom on behalf of the European Union. In light of Turkey's deep-rooted historical and friendly ties with Afghanistan, I would like to take the floor to further highlight a number of points with regard to my country's views and endeavours concerning Afghanistan.

Let me first underline that Turkey is a sponsor of the present draft resolution, which we feel objectively reflects both the successes achieved and certain challenges encountered in the implementation of the Bonn Agreement. We expect that the text as a whole will convey a strong message of solidarity with the Afghan people and at the same time reaffirm the determination and commitment of the international community to remain seized of the developments.

We welcome the parliamentary and provincial council elections of 18 September, which constitute an important milestone in the development of democracy in Afghanistan. "Afghanistan for Afghans" has always been Turkey's motto. Turkey firmly believes that an all-embracing Afghan identity is the key to stability and prosperity for this friendly country. Turkey attaches great importance to the national unity and territorial integrity of Afghanistan.

As representative of a country that has twice led the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, for a total of 14 months in the last three years, I also wish to reiterate Turkey's continued commitment to helping achieve lasting peace and security in that country. In this respect, we believe that building a national army and a national police force is crucial, not only for Afghanistan's long-term security, but also for the national unity of the country. With this understanding, Turkey has also contributed to the establishment of a national army and police force by supporting relevant procurement and training programmes in both Turkey and Afghanistan.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

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Our support for Afghanistan is not confined to the military and security fields alone. Turkey has also been actively involved in the social, health, education and agriculture sectors. In this context, Turkey believes that the expeditious implementation of reconstruction projects is of great importance for Afghanistan. Turkish firms and construction companies are actively involved in carrying out some of these projects.

Combating drug production and illicit trafficking constitutes one of Afghanistan's top priorities. The creation of alternative means of making a living, which will offer new opportunities to the Afghan people, is imperative in achieving this goal. The eradication of poppy fields should be seen in this larger context.

It is evident that a democratic, united and prosperous Afghanistan will set an excellent example for other countries and peoples going through similar experiences and difficulties. Thus, neither Afghanistan nor the international community can afford to fail. Let me commend the untiring and dedicated work of both the Afghan leadership and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan in responding to the great challenges ahead. Let me also reiterate the strong commitment of the Turkish Government to the security, unity, reconstruction and welfare of Afghanistan.

**Mr. Vohidov** (Uzbekistan) (*spoke in Russian*): At the outset, let me note that the delegation of Uzbekistan fully endorses the ideas contained in the statement of the delegation of the People's Republic of China on behalf of the member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Uzbekistan welcomes the considerable economic and political successes achieved in the past year by the Government of Afghanistan in the reconstruction of that country, including the holding of parliamentary elections and the continuing establishment of institutions of State administration, including such elements as the army, law enforcement agencies and the judicial system.

Clearly, the international community is playing a considerable role in positive developments, in particular in the implementation of the Bonn process. Our country, as one of Afghanistan's immediate neighbours, shares with it a centuries-long history of good-neighbourly relations and is truly interested in the re-establishment of a peaceful, stable Afghan State. Viewing this country as an integral part of the Central Asian space, Uzbekistan actively advocates including it in regional integration processes.

Given the level of understanding achieved by the international community with respect to the use of existing resources and the experience acquired by neighbouring countries whose capacity could be used to rebuild the Afghan economy, I would like to note briefly the contribution of Uzbekistan in this area.

Based on the growing legal foundation for Uzbek-Afghan cooperation, our country is providing assistance to the Afghan people in reconstructing and building its infrastructure, including road and transportation lines, water management and energy facilities, and irrigation structures. For a number of years now, a mechanism established jointly with the United Nations to coordinate the flow of goods from international organizations and donor countries has been functioning successfully. This flow has reached the point where it now represents many millions of dollars. Accordingly, Uzbekistan has reduced the cost of transporting goods to Afghanistan and is carrying out measures to enhance the service infrastructure.

Taking into account the social and economic importance that the Afghan leadership attaches to providing electricity to northern and central Afghanistan, Uzbekistan is providing uninterrupted delivery of electricity to its neighbour.

An important element in ensuring the success of Uzbek-Afghan cooperation is the fact that the relevant Uzbek agencies have 30 years of experience in working in Afghanistan in the area of economic development. We have sufficient numbers of highly qualified experts who speak the languages of the peoples living in Afghanistan. The transportation infrastructure network that has been developed and the territorial proximity of Afghanistan make it possible to minimize the costs and time required to deliver necessary goods to that country.

Given the broad practical experience of Uzbekistan's experts and the fact that we have prepared draft documentation for water and irrigation facilities for the northern part of Afghanistan, my country has the capability to organize the work to restore Afghanistan's water supply systems. Our experts have developed a project to supply water to the cities and main inhabited areas of the provinces of Balkh, Baghlan, Badghis, Jowzjan, Kondoz, Samangan, Takhar, Faryab and Herat. With that capability, Uzbekistan is prepared to expand its cooperation with the Government of Afghanistan in other areas,

including geological prospecting and the laying of local and international telecommunication lines linked to international fibre optics communication lines.

The presence of transportation links is playing a special role with regard to diversifying the process to improve the social and economic situation in Afghanistan and developing integration processes. In that connection, we wish to draw the Assembly's attention to the importance of implementing the initiative to establish an international trans-Afghan transportation corridor. Such an example of economic cooperation is in the interests of both Afghanistan and neighbouring countries, as well as of the entire international community.

Despite the progress made in Afghanistan in social development, there are nevertheless concerns about ongoing problems in the area of security. We have expressed our concern with regard to the growth in terrorist activities by the Taliban and other terrorist groups.

A key element to strengthening stability in the country is integrating Afghanistan into the Central Asian political and economic system. We look forward to Afghanistan's increased participation in the process to establish a regional common market. In the middle and long terms, it will be important to include Afghanistan as an observer country in the activities of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

There is growing concern among the international community and the States of the region about the rise in the production of drugs in Afghanistan. In countering that threat, in addition to establishing security belts around the country, it is very important to bring about profound structural reforms in the Afghan economy. Without such reforms, the nexus between drugs and terrorism will continue to be a major threat to Afghanistan's national security and to the Government's effective functioning. The establishment in Central Asia of a regional information and coordination centre to combat transboundary crime related to the illicit trafficking in drugs will also be an effective step towards tackling the scourge of drugs, given the fact that the region is on the front lines of the fight against the flow of drugs.

For the sake of a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan, the international community must now deliver on the pledges of assistance to the Government of Afghanistan made by donors at the Tokyo and Berlin Conferences. Moreover, we once again join the appeal made in the final communiqué issued by the meeting of foreign ministers of the Organization of the Islamic Conference held here in New York on 23 September 2005 (*A/60/440*). The ministers called on Member States that had made pledges to the Afghan People Assistance Fund to expedite the remittance of their donations in order to strengthen the Fund's resources thereby making it possible for it to more effectively contribute to the achievement of its intended noble humanitarian goals.

Given the foregoing, Uzbekistan welcomes the draft resolution on Afghanistan introduced yesterday by the delegation of Germany. We hope that its adoption by consensus will once again confirm the international community's readiness to do its utmost to assist in the peaceful reconstruction of Afghanistan.

**Mr. Shata** (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am pleased to participate in the debate on agenda item 17, entitled "The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security", and sub-item (e) of agenda item 73, entitled "Emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and reconstruction of war-stricken Afghanistan". At the outset, I should like to join my colleagues in thanking the Secretary-General for his report on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (*A/60/224*).

Afghanistan has made great progress in recent years in the peacebuilding and reconstruction process. However, we must not forget that, like other countries emerging from decades of internal strife, it needs the ongoing support of the international community in all areas. The encouraging achievements made in Afghanistan must be continued and promoted, especially with regard to security, economic and social development, the fight against drugs, the rebuilding of Afghan civil institutions and the work with the international community to tackle terrorism and end that scourge, which threatens international peace and security.

Based on our desire to achieve stability, security and peace in Afghanistan, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has not failed to assist that fraternal country. At the January 2002 Tokyo Conference, Saudi Arabia announced its contribution of $200 million through the Saudi Development Fund, as well as $20 million to support the Afghan budget. That amount has been

remitted to the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, which is managed by the World Bank. Those funds were in addition to the $1 million pledged to support the United Nations programme to cover the wages of the staff of the Afghan Interim Authority. Of the $200 million, $30 million were earmarked for the Kabul-Kandahar-Herat road project on 10 August 2003. An agreement to devote $20 million to other road construction projects in Afghanistan was also signed.

We have also pledged $60 million to official and unofficial humanitarian assistance. During the Berlin Conference, held on 31 March and 1 April 2004, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia pledged an additional $10 million for the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund. That was in addition to the $150 million it pledged to the fund for development projects in health, education and infrastructure, in coordination with the Afghan Government.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is prepared to cooperate closely with the Government of Afghanistan in the interests of the two fraternal countries. We call upon the international community to continue its support to the fraternal Government and people of Afghanistan, so that they may play their rightful role in the community of nations and achieve stability, security and peace.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): We have heard the last speaker in the debate on agenda items 17 and 73 (e).

The General Assembly will now proceed to consider draft resolution A/60/L.27, as orally revised.

The General Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/60/L.27, as orally revised. Draft resolution A/60/L.27 has two parts. Part A is entitled "The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security", and part B is entitled "Emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and reconstruction of war-stricken Afghanistan".

Since the introduction of draft resolution A/60/L.27, Nepal has become a sponsor of the draft resolution.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/60/L.27, as orally revised?

*Draft resolution A/60/L.27, as orally revised, was adopted* (resolution 60/32).

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): Before giving the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, who wishes to speak in explanation of position on the resolution just adopted, may I remind delegations that explanations of vote or position are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

**Mrs. Núñez de Odremán** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): The delegation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela did not object to the consensus on draft resolution A/60/L.27, as orally revised, because our country fully supports the efforts being made to achieve peace and reconstruction in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, we are deeply concerned about the fragility of the situation within Afghanistan because it works against political stability and the full exercise of the inalienable right of the people to self-determination. The situation is also being used as an argument to justify the presence on Afghan territory of forces of a foreign Power that in one way or another interfere in the internal affairs of that nation and its people.

In particular, we would like to note our reservation concerning the resolution's reference to the Operation Enduring Freedom coalition. It must be recalled that in Afghanistan, the principles of non-intervention and of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States were violated, because Operation Enduring Freedom was an intervention that set up a provisional Government in that country. At present, in Afghanistan there is a Government that was elected in 2004; parliamentary and provincial elections took place in 2005.

Nonetheless, references in the resolution to the Operation Enduring Freedom coalition attempt to endorse the use of force on Afghan territory and confer on the coalition an active role alongside the International Security Assistance Force, which was established by the United Nations to provide support in the areas of security, the rule of law, the fight against corruption, the fight against terrorism, peacebuilding, stability and the development of Afghanistan.

We consider that this once again reflects the way — biased, ambiguous and harmful vis-à-vis the Afghan people — in which the United Nations has approached emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and reconstruction of war-stricken countries. That arises from the idea of a collapsed, failed or enfeebled

State and from a supposed right of the international community to determine the nature of the institutions that need to be built as alternatives for a State that has been stigmatized as having failed and being incapable of carrying out basic State functions.

But that right, as ensured by the United Nations Charter, belongs only to peoples in the exercise of their sovereign, inalienable right to self-determination. The manner in which the international community has taken action in that context is simply an act of intervention, especially when such actions do not decisively address the deep root causes of the current situation in Afghanistan, that is, its grave social and political problems, which the report of the Secretary-General on this item does not analyse in depth.

Our position on the resolution and on the report of the Secretary-General is that effective conflict prevention and the reconstruction of countries must be carried out through policies that promote the sustainable development of peoples, without losing sight of the fact that only the peoples themselves have the right to decide their destiny, because peace with foreign intervention but without development does not allow for the building of genuine democratic institutions.

Venezuela is convinced that there can be no stability without economic and social development. That is why we believe that the international community should provide unconditional support, in a spirit of solidarity with the Afghan people, so that they will have sufficient resources to resolve their problems on the basis of their own priorities and development programmes.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela can accept the use of force only in cases of legitimate self-defence. In view of all that I have said, our delegation did not sponsor the draft resolution, and we reiterate our reservations about its content.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): We have heard the only speaker in explanation of position.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 17 and sub-item (e) of agenda item 73?

*It was so decided.*

**Agenda item 41 (*continued*)**

**Report of the Economic and Social Council**

**Draft resolutions (A/60/L.21 and A/60/L.24)**

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): Members will recall that the General Assembly held a debate on the agenda item at its 37th plenary meeting, held on 25 October 2005.

I now give the floor to the representative of Jamaica to introduce draft resolution A/60/L.21.

**Mr. Neil** (Jamaica): On behalf of the Group of 77 and China, I have the honour to introduce for the consideration of the General Assembly the draft resolution entitled "Deferral of the smooth transition period for the graduation of Maldives from the list of least developed countries", which has been issued as document A/60/L.21.

On 26 December 2004, as we are all painfully aware, the Indian Ocean tsunami struck, causing death and destruction across two continents. The economic, social and environmental conditions of the Maldive islands changed fundamentally within a matter of hours. There was destruction and disruption on a scale difficult to imagine.

The tsunami occurred only just after the General Assembly had agreed that Maldives had reached a point in its fragile process of economic development at which it could be graduated from the category of least developed countries. It was one week before Maldives was to enter the agreed three-year period with a view to a smooth transition from the least-developed-country category.

Our fundamental assumption in making that decision was that, even with decreasing external assistance, Maldives would have been able to build on the advances that it had already made so that its economic and social gains would become increasingly self-sustaining. The Indian Ocean tsunami removed the basis of our assumption. No expert can now predict when Maldives will return to its pre-December 2004 situation, or even if it ever will. The Committee for Development Policy, on which this Assembly has come to rely for analysis and projections on the likely performance of the least developed countries, has indicated that it would not have a basis on which to

make a projection for Maldives in any reasonable time frame.

Owing to those uncertain circumstances there was an obvious need to make some adjustments by varying the terms of Assembly resolution 59/210 to meet the needs of a changed situation. That is of great importance for Maldives, but it is also important for us as a demonstration of solidarity with the people of Maldives at this time. They and their Government need our understanding, cooperation and support. Resource needs are still substantial if they are to meet the targets for reconstruction. We hope that the donor community will contribute generously towards rebuilding efforts.

The draft resolution contained in A/60/L.21 is straightforward. Essentially, the General Assembly would decide to defer for a period of three years the commencement of the three-year smooth transition period for the graduation of Maldives from the list of least developed countries. Paragraph 3 underlines the unique nature of the decision, resulting from the consequences of an unprecedented disaster. The draft resolution enjoys the support of all parties. We express appreciation for the cooperation and flexibility shown by our partners in the negotiation of the text.

On behalf of the Group of 77 and China, I commend the draft resolution to the General Assembly for adoption by consensus.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Korea to introduce draft resolution A/60/L.24.

**Mr. Choi** Young-jin (Republic of Korea): I am pleased to remind the Assembly that in September our leaders reaffirmed that good governance is essential for sustainable development. They furthermore stated that sound economic policies, solid democratic institutions and improved infrastructure are the basis for the eradication of poverty and successful employment creation. It is my honour to report on the progress that Member States have made during the past two months to put that commitment into action in the form of a draft resolution.

On behalf of the sponsors, I would like to introduce the draft resolution contained in document A/60/L.24, entitled "Public administration and development", under agenda item 41, "Report of the Economic and Social Council". It highlights the importance of good governance, as well as transparent and accountable public administration, in achieving internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

As the Secretary-General stated in his report on public administration and development (*A/60/114*), good governance and effective public administration systems are indeed essential elements for developing countries in reducing extreme poverty and achieving improved living standards. In this regard, the draft resolution emphasizes national efforts to improve governance, public administration and institutional and managerial capacities. At the same time, it encourages the international community to increase support for national efforts in public administration through North-South cooperation, South-South cooperation and public-private partnerships.

In addition, the draft resolution stresses the important role of the United Nations vis-à-vis information-sharing in public administration. It requests that the Secretary-General continue to facilitate the dissemination of information, knowledge and valuable practices in public administration through its existing network.

The draft resolution also requests the United Nations to maximize the effectiveness of its activities by strengthening partnerships with other international and regional organizations and by promoting the use of information and communication technologies as development tools.

Furthermore, the draft resolution reflects the outcome of the Seoul Declaration on Participatory and Transparent Governance, which was adopted at the Sixth Global Forum on Reinventing Government, held in Seoul in May 2005. It recognizes the importance of Government efforts to foster public participation in governance and development processes through the cooperation of all stakeholders within each society. It also requests all Member States to foster a culture of transparency, accountability and the rejection of corruption at all levels, consistent with the United Nations Convention against Corruption.

I would like to take this opportunity to inform the Assembly that the draft text contained in A/60/L.24 has been revised slightly, by consensus, in two places, following consultations with Member States. The revisions apply to operative paragraph 5. Just before the phrase "through North-South cooperation", the word "particularly" would be replaced with

"including", and "inter alia" would be inserted after "public-private partnership to". Revised operative paragraph 5 would thus read:

> "Encourages the international community to increase support for national efforts, including those of developing countries, in public administration, including through North-South cooperation, South-South cooperation and public-private partnership to, inter alia, provide financial, educational, material and technical support and cooperation as appropriate".

I would like to take this opportunity to announce that, in addition to those countries listed in A/60/L.24, the following Member States have added their names to the list of sponsors: Israel, Italy, Mali, Singapore and the United States of America.

It is my hope that this important draft resolution will be adopted by consensus.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): The General Assembly will now take action on draft resolutions A/60/L.21 and A/60/L.24 as orally revised.

The Assembly will first consider draft resolution A/60/L.21, entitled "Deferral of the smooth transition period for the graduation of Maldives from the list of least developed countries".

May I take it that the General Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/60/L.21?

> *The draft resolution was adopted (resolution 60/33).*

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): The General Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/60/L.24, as orally corrected, entitled "Public administration and development".

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/60/L.24, as orally corrected?

> *The draft resolution, as orally corrected, was adopted (resolution 60/34).*

**Mr. Latheef** (Maldives): The consensus adoption of draft resolution A/60/L.21, entitled "Deferral of the smooth transition period for the graduation of Maldives from the list of least developed countries", not only gives hope and encouragement to my country, it also demonstrates the unwavering commitment of the international community to truly ensure a smooth transition for graduating countries so that their development plans and projects will not be interrupted due to graduation. That decision has given us confidence that the international community will stand by us and render whatever assistance may be necessary to repair the damage caused by the tsunami to the Maldives and to move ahead with the development process.

On behalf of my country, allow me to take this opportunity to extend our sincere appreciation to the entire international community for the understanding and support it has extended to us in the formulation and consensus adoption of the resolution. With particular gratitude, I wish to reiterate our heartfelt appreciation to the members of the Group of 77 and China, especially to its Chairperson, for the solidarity and the unqualified support they have extended to my country on this issue. I would also like to extend our very sincere thanks to the European Union, Japan and the United States of America for the understanding and flexibility that they have shown in accommodating our request for an extension. We will always remember the difficult concessions they made in order to reach agreement. We would also like to put on record our thanks for the unwavering support from President Clinton, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Tsunami Recovery, as well as his office. Last but not the least, allow me to express our sincere gratitude to Mr. Carlos Gabriel Ruiz Massieu Aguirre of Mexico for the helpful manner in which he facilitated the resolution.

We know of no country or region that has successfully attained full recovery from a disaster of this scale in three years. We are therefore aware of the challenges that lie ahead of us. However, we are a determined people, and we would like to assure the Assembly and the international community that we will leave no stone unturned to achieve our recovery. We fully understand that the tsunami has placed serious obstacles in the path of our vision of becoming a middle-income developing country by 2020. Nevertheless, our resolve will not be weakened. We are confident that, once again with the help of our development partners, we will build better and emerge from the disaster stronger than ever and proceed with the process of graduation as specified in resolution 59/209.

The Indian Ocean tsunami has yet again demonstrated the extent of the vulnerabilities faced by small island States like the Maldives. No single island

of my country was spared in the disaster. Within a matter of minutes, most of the development progress that we have worked so hard to achieve over many decades, along with the basis for the decision to graduate our country, was literally washed away and destroyed.

Nearly a year has passed since the disaster, but the situation in the Maldives has not eased. The disproportionate economic impact of the tsunami on my country is far too great for us to rebound easily. The disaster has effectively paralysed the economy. We pray that that will only be temporary. Rising oil prices, unforeseen tsunami-related expenditures and revenue shortfalls in the tourism sector are creating significant fiscal pressures at alarmingly high levels. As a direct result of that situation, for the first time in our history we are now faced with an acute financial crisis and are forced to appeal for budgetary support from our development partners and other friendly countries.

Before I conclude, allow me also to say here that there is still a major funding gap in my country's national tsunami recovery and reconstruction programmes. Of a total $470 million needed for the programme, nearly a third is yet to be pledged. The Maldives is the only country experiencing such a funding gap. While we express our deep appreciation to our development partners and the entire world community for the most generous assistance that they have already extended to us, we would like to make a plea to the international community for further assistance to bridge that gap as soon as possible, for it will be almost impossible for us to pull ourselves out of this disaster without such help.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): The General Assembly has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of agenda item 41.

**Agenda item 120 (continued)**

**Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit**

**Draft resolution (A/60/L.26)**

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): I call on the representative of China to introduce draft resolution A/60/L.26.

**Mr. Zhang** Yishan (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I am honoured to introduce, under agenda item 120, for consideration by the General Assembly draft resolution A/60/L.26, entitled "Enhancing capacity-building in global public health".

This year marks the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations. The recently held World Summit reviewed the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and adopted the World Summit Outcome. Leaders at the summit made a series of solemn commitments on HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and other health issues. One of the MDGs is to curb and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS by 2015. That is also an important element of the World Summit Outcome. The United Nations and its Member States should strengthen their cooperation and continue their efforts to fulfil those objectives.

Currently, the international community continues to face serious challenges in the field of public health. The threat of avian influenza and other infectious diseases is far from over, and the possibility of the outbreak of a large-scale pandemic still exists. The Indian Ocean tsunami, Hurricane Katrina, the earthquakes in South-East Asia and other national disasters have posed even greater threats to public health systems. And they are just the tip of the iceberg in terms of the global public health crisis facing humanity in the twenty-first century.

The international community should have already realized that the weakness of the public health system has become a major problem for countries in their efforts to achieve comprehensive and sustainable development against the backdrop of globalization. The issue of public health is not limited by national borders; our efforts in that regard can never be successful without close regional and international cooperation. Only by responding to these challenges through joint efforts on the part of all Member States can we build a harmonious society through coordinated and sustainable economic and social development.

The Chinese Government attaches great importance to public health. In recent years, we have invested heavily in enhancing capacity-building in public health and in improving the emergency response mechanism, and we have made vigorous efforts to prevent and treat major infectious diseases. Through our cooperation with many other countries and with the United Nations, the World Health Organization, the World Bank and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, we have accumulated valuable experience in fighting

HIV/AIDS, malaria, severe acute respiratory syndrome and highly pathogenic avian influenza, as well as in post-disaster rescue, treatment and disease control. We are confident that, with the international effort to enhance capacity-building in global public health, the internationally recognized health-related development goals will be achieved.

For those reasons, the Chinese delegation is for the third time introducing this draft resolution to the General Assembly under the same title. Consensus was achieved among interested parties through extensive consultations.

This year's draft embodies the health-related commitments set out in the World Summit Outcome (*resolution 60/1*) with a view to its implementation. It reinforces itself through elements such as national capacity-building and the training of health personnel. It calls upon all countries to implement the revised International Health Regulations, expresses concern about a possible pandemic of human influenza arising from avian influenza and welcomes relevant responses by the United Nations and other appropriate international and national measures.

In addition, the draft resolution urges the international community to raise awareness about the deleterious impact of natural disasters on public health systems and to strengthen international cooperation in related areas. It requests the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its sixty-first session a report on the implementation of the resolution, which will be his first report to the Assembly exclusively on public health.

There were 167 sponsors of the draft resolution when it was first submitted. Since then, the following countries have become sponsors: Brazil, Egypt, the Gambia, Ghana, Grenada and Serbia and Montenegro. On behalf of the Chinese Government, I would like to sincerely thank all the sponsors and those who participated in the consultations. We hope that the General Assembly will adopt draft resolution A/60/L.26 by consensus.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): We shall now proceed to consider draft resolution A/60/L.26.

I shall call on those representatives who wish to speak in explanation of position before action is taken on the draft resolution. May I remind delegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

**Mrs. Núñez de Odremán** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We wish to express the commitment of the Venezuelan State to capacity-building in the area of public health. We firmly believe that the development and implementation of public health policy are among the main mechanisms for fighting poverty and social exclusion in our population.

In that connection, the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has believed that health and quality of life are the main policy axes of a new approach, as a human and social right inherent to life. Therefore, they are of great public relevance and constitute an area for intersectoral implementation based on a commitment to joint responsibility on the part of all public sectors.

For that reason, we have developed the Inner-City Mission, aimed at providing basic services to the entire population — particularly those perpetually excluded — as a priority of our health policy, which is guided by the principles of equity, universality, accessibility, not requiring payment, cross-sectoral implementation, cultural inclusion, participation, justice and shared social responsibility.

Furthermore, we express our support and appreciation to the delegation and the Government of China for introducing this draft resolution. We support its contents and join in the consensus. However, we wish to express our reservation about the second preambular paragraph of the draft resolution — which is the reason why we decided not to sponsor it — although the draft resolution is fully in line with our commitment and our domestic policy. As the General Assembly is already aware, the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela does not recognize the outcome document (*resolution 60/1*) as part of the results of the 2005 world summit. Therefore, that document generates no mandate or obligation for the Republic.

**Mr. Cumberbach Miguén** (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation, as a sponsor of draft resolution A/60/L.26, wishes to make clear that our statement is of a general nature.

Ever since the triumph of the Cuban revolution, international cooperation has been one of the pillars of our country's foreign policy. The strengthening of this

important aspect of international relations has been endorsed in the outcomes of United Nations summits and conferences, including the Millennium Summit.

For years, Cuba — despite the fact that it is a small developing country and has been subjected for more than 45 years to the blockade policy of the United States — has developed a cooperation programme that has placed special emphasis on helping to build the national public health capacities of the countries that have requested such aid, particularly developing nations. We have done so through the presence of health personnel on the ground and by granting thousands of scholarships to young people in many brotherly nations of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

That is why we wish to thank the delegation of the People's Republic of China for introducing draft resolution A/60/L.26, entitled "Enhancing capacity-building in global public health". We are convinced that that text — which is supported by the sponsorship of more than 170 delegations — will help to strengthen the role of the United Nations in promoting improvements in health in our world. That is an essential issue if we wish to attain the development objectives set out in the Organization's agenda, particularly those agreed at the Millennium Summit.

Moreover, the initiative recognizes the need to strengthen cooperation mechanisms in the area of public health this year, when we are dealing with the consequences of natural disasters. That question is of singular importance to the countries of the third world. Nothing could be more relevant given that we have witnessed in recent months the devastating effects of these phenomena, which are increasingly difficult to mitigate. Indeed, our country has undertaken new initiatives in that regard.

Our delegation wishes to reiterate Cuba's willingness to continue to work towards agreement on global actions in the field of public health in order to help those most in need and to contribute to creating a better world for all.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): We have heard the last speaker in explanation of position before a decision is taken.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/60/L.26, entitled "Enhancing capacity-building in global public health".

I should like to inform the Assembly that since the introduction of the draft resolution, Angola has become a sponsor.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/60/L.26?

*Draft resolution A/60/L.26 was adopted (resolution 60/35).*

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 120.

**Agenda item 15** ***(continued)***

**Question of Palestine**

**Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/60/35)**

**Report of the Secretary-General (A/60/539)**

**Draft resolutions (A/60/L.28, A/60/L.30, A/60/L.31)**

**Mr. Abdul Azeez** (Sri Lanka): The 10th of this month of November marked the thirtieth anniversary of the establishment by the General Assembly of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. We were reminded on that day by the Committee that that anniversary was an opportunity for us to reflect upon the decades of failed efforts to resolve the question of Palestine and to redouble our efforts to bring about a just solution of that question.

The continued relevance of the Committee's mandate to the pursuit of peace, freedom and justice for the Palestinian people cannot be overemphasized. Since its establishment in 1975, the Committee has made commendable efforts to promote the full realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and to mobilize international support for their cause. It has advanced a number of initiatives to ameliorate the plight of the Palestinian people and to keep the focus continuously on issues of vital concern to them. We thank Ambassador Paul Badji for his initiative and leadership in that regard.

Sri Lanka has consistently supported the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and their

right to an independent sovereign State based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), and other relevant resolutions.

The newly elected President of Sri Lanka, Mahinda Rajapakse, has been an abiding friend of the Palestinian people. I wish to quote the message he sent on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

> "Sri Lanka has consistently advocated for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and extended our firm and unequivocal support to their just struggle in obtaining their rights, including the right to statehood.
>
> "In my public life of over 30 years, I have associated myself with the cause of Palestine and supported activities in my country and elsewhere aimed at promoting the rights and freedoms for Palestinian people.
>
> "The reports on the continued hardships and deprivations suffered by the Palestinians almost on a daily basis fill me with profound sorrow. While expressing my concern on such incidents, I sincerely hope that the efforts to put an end to violence and take forward the peace process will soon bring successful results.
>
> "On behalf of the Government and the people of Sri Lanka, I take this opportunity to reaffirm our continuing solidarity with the Palestinian people and to share their hopes and aspirations of seeing an end to foreign occupation, realizing a Palestinian State and a durable peace." (*See A/AC.183/PV.290.*)

During the past year, we have witnessed the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, the holding of a meeting between Israeli and Palestinian leaders, and, more recently, the conclusion of the agreement on the Gaza-Egypt border crossing between Israel and Palestine.

These developments enhance the prospect of reviving the peace process within the framework of the Quartet road map and should be welcomed. However, the continuation of violence and attacks on civilians, the intensified expansion of settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and the continued construction of the separation wall in the occupied Palestinian territory, in contravention of international law, remains a matter of deep concern.

The summit meeting between the Israeli Prime Minister and the Palestinian Authority President held at Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, early this year, created fresh momentum towards the resumption of the peace process. They were able to reach understandings on a number of important issues, most importantly a commitment to cease all acts of violence.

We welcome the removal of all Israeli settlements from the Gaza Strip and parts of the northern West Bank and the withdrawal of the Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip. Despite the withdrawal, Israel's control of the borders had prevented the free movement of people and goods in and out of Gaza and stood in the way of the achievement of the desired goal of economic development for the Palestinian people, who for far too long have undergone extreme hardships in terms of their living conditions.

We hope that the agreement on the Gaza-Egypt border crossing between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, reached on 15 November 2005, will facilitate the free movement of the Palestinian people and improve their economic situation. Furthermore, we believe that this will contribute to the confidence-building measures between the parties and help them to renew their focus on the peace process and address other pressing issues such as the need to end violence, stop settlement activities and improve the living conditions of the Palestinian people.

We appreciate the recent efforts made by the Quartet members for advancing a peaceful settlement and hope that the international community will continue to work towards the achievement of a peaceful solution and the establishment of a Palestinian State, existing side by side with Israel, within secure and recognized boundaries.

**Mr. Zarif** (Islamic Republic of Iran): At the very outset, and on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I would like to reiterate the solidarity of the Government and the people of the Islamic Republic of Iran with the Palestinian people and authorities in their brave struggle to defend their inalienable rights.

May I also take this opportunity to express my delegation's appreciation to the Secretary-General for his informative reports and to the Chairman and the members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for their

tireless and determined efforts to address the onerous circumstances of the Palestinians.

This year's report once again illustrates the uninterrupted and increasing violations of the rights and aspirations of the Palestinian people by the Israeli regime, which have resulted in the deterioration of the situation to an unprecedented and intolerable level. As the report indicates, throughout the period under review the systematic pattern of human rights violations and massive breaches of international law and international humanitarian law by Israel continued unabated.

The continued unspeakable sufferings of the Palestinian people, including the rising number of deaths and injuries among civilians, the deepening humanitarian crisis and the widespread destruction of Palestinian property and infrastructure, are but the direct consequences of the unlawful and inhumane policies and practices of the Israeli regime in the occupied territories.

Over the past six decades, Palestinians have been subjected to persecution, punishment and deprivation simply because of their wish to exercise their legitimate and inalienable rights, especially the right to live in their homeland. Annexation of the occupied territories, construction of new settlements in the territories occupied in 1967, implementation of a policy of apartheid by segregating Palestinians of some residential areas from the others, construction of the separation wall and deportation of Palestinians: these and many other transgressions threaten the lives of Palestinian men, women and children on a daily basis and are but a few examples of the inhumane Israeli policies and cruel measures which have prevailed throughout all these years of occupation and suppression.

Sadly, the failure of the international community to address the Palestinian issue fairly and effectively has further exacerbated this condition. We are commemorating the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people while — as the realities on the ground abundantly suggest — Israel continues to defy the will of the international community, particularly numerous United Nations resolutions and decisions. As noted in the reports of the Secretary-General and the Committee, during the period under review and in defiance of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and the unambiguous appeals by the international community, the Israeli regime has continued the construction of the illegal wall in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Moreover, Israel has even announced its decision to accelerate plans for completing the wall. The direct and grave impact of this ongoing illegal practice on the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and on the prospect for achieving a just and lasting solution for the Palestinian situation is indeed indisputable.

Furthermore, as the report of the Committee illustrates, settlement construction and expansion in the West Bank has continued apace over the past 12 months. New facts on the ground were also accompanied by alarming reports of plans for intensified construction in the West Bank settlements, in contravention of international law. In addition, the Israeli regime's plan to enlarge settlements in the West Bank would be, if implemented, the largest expansion project ever witnessed and would involve the confiscation of an area larger than the Gaza Strip.

A disturbing fact regarding the Gaza disengagement has been pertinently spelled out in the letter from the representative of Palestine to the Secretary-General. This plan, despite Israel's massive propaganda campaign, has been implemented concurrently with the increase of settlement activities, acceleration of the construction of the illegal wall and the complete isolation of East Jerusalem from the rest of the occupied Palestinian territories.

We fully share the valid concern that the focus of the international community on Gaza withdrawal has been manipulated and exploited by the Israeli regime in order to complete its colonization and de facto annexation of huge areas of the West Bank. Moreover, Israel's illegal control of the borders of the Gaza Strip, including its territorial sea and airspace, and of the movement of people and goods into and out of Gaza, has turned the Gaza Strip into a vast open-air prison for the Palestinian people and has also hampered any meaningful economic development in the area.

As indicated in the reports of the Secretary-General and the Palestinian Rights Committee, in the course of this year Israeli raids into Palestinian population centres, extrajudicial killings, house demolitions and arrests continued unabated. The humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people remained grave and standards of health and education continued to deteriorate. Close to 4,000 Palestinians

have been killed and 40,000 wounded since the start of the intifada, while Israel has made a total of 35,000 Palestinian arrests since September 2000. The growing number of women and children directly harmed by violence and torture in Israeli prisons has been especially worrying. Over 4,000 Palestinian homes have been destroyed since the beginning of the current intifada.

Furthermore, the deliberate measures adopted and implemented by Israel to destroy the already fragile Palestinian economy have pushed the economy to the verge of collapse. Palestinian living conditions have declined dramatically and the health and nutritional status of the Palestinian population, particularly women and children, has worsened.

It is long overdue for the international community to take meaningful measures to restore the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. The Charter of the United Nations has conferred an immense responsibility upon this world body to help find a fair and durable solution to this crisis, which constitutes the core of the Middle East conflict. We believe that a durable peace in Palestine will be possible only through the full restoration of the rights of the Palestinian people, including the return of all Palestinian refugees to their homeland and the establishment of a Palestinian State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

The situation in the occupied Syrian Golan is also a matter of grave concern for the international community. It continues to be another source of tension in the region. The Israeli regime has thus far indicated that it does not intend to consider a withdrawal from the Golan. Rather, it has made repeated attempts to alter the demographic and legal character of the area by establishing new settlements and imposing its laws on Syrian citizens, in contravention of all relevant United Nations resolutions and principles of international law. Since the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan in 1967, the international community has always reiterated its firm rejection of that occupation and repeatedly called for withdrawal of Israel from the entire Syrian Golan.

The international community's concern over this issue has been constantly reflected in various resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, including Assembly resolution 59/33, which, inter alia, termed null and void Israel's decision to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration on the Syrian Golan. In its resolution 497 (1981), the Security Council also called upon Israel to annul its decisions and actions on the Syrian Golan.

Furthermore, Israel's threats and repeated aggression against Lebanon have remained a major source of concern. The Lebanese people have already demonstrated their resolve in defending their homeland. We believe that the stability and sovereignty of Lebanon are decisive for the maintenance of regional peace and security.

The international community bears a heavy responsibility in addressing the Israeli regime's policy of threats and use of force against other Member States of the United Nations, as well as its systematic and gross violations of the basic human rights of the Palestinian people, in contravention of the Charter of the United Nations and international law. Should we neglect to address this responsibility fairly and properly, the situation in this volatile region will remain bleak.

**Mr. Nguyen Duy Chien** (Viet Nam): It gives the Vietnamese delegation great pleasure to participate in today's discussion on the important agenda item on the question of Palestine. We would like to join other speakers in thanking the Secretary-General and the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for their reports relating to the question of Palestine, as contained in documents A/60/539 and A/60/35, respectively.

It is Viet Nam's long-standing position that achieving a final and peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, is imperative for the attainment of peace and stability in the Middle East. A comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine must be based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and the following essential principles: the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem, and from other occupied Arab territories; recognition and exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, primarily the right to their State of Palestine in their own homeland; and respect for the right of all States in the region to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized boundaries.

The two reports before us have shown that the situation relating to the question of Palestine during the period under review was marked by promise and hope, as well as by developments on the ground that complicated efforts to resume the peace process within the framework of the road map.

The Palestinian people and institutions have succeeded in achieving a peaceful, democratic and responsible transition. As noted in the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the Palestinian Authority, President Mahmoud Abbas and other members of the Palestinian leadership have made serious efforts to end violence, strengthen the national unity of the Palestinian people and achieve a solution of the question of Palestine through exclusively peaceful negotiation.

The positive developments also include the resumption of dialogue at the highest level between Palestinian and Israeli leaders, the removal of all Israeli settlements from the Gaza Strip and parts of the northern West Bank and the withdrawal of the Israeli army from the Gaza Strip, which we hope will lead to Israel's withdrawal from other occupied Palestinian territory. The agreement on, and the opening of, the Rafah border crossing constitutes an important step in the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

Despite that progress, we are deeply concerned over the continuing violence in the occupied Palestinian territory. We are further concerned over the intensified expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the acceleration in the work to complete the illegal wall built in the occupied Palestinian territory, in defiance of the 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and the position of the international community. We hold that the Court's advisory opinion and international law in general must be respected. We call upon Israel to comply with its legal obligations, in accordance with the advisory opinion as well as General Assembly resolution ES-10/15 of 20 July 2004.

On the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, our delegation wishes to reaffirm the consistent support of the Vietnamese people and Government for the just cause of the Palestinian people in the struggle for their inalienable rights. We welcome and support efforts of the international community, including ongoing efforts of the Quartet, to promote the peace process in the Middle East, and we call upon concerned parties to exert all efforts necessary to facilitate a speedy resumption of the peace process and the conclusion of a final peaceful settlement. We believe that, with the support of the international community, the just cause of the Palestinian people will achieve full victory.

**Mr. Mekdad** (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Since 1977 the General Assembly of the United Nations and all advocates of freedom and justice throughout the world have been meeting annually on 29 November to recall one of the greatest tragedies and challenges that we all face — namely, the denial by Israel of the most basic human rights of the Palestinian people, in particular the right to self-determination and the establishment of their independent State on their national soil.

I wish to express my special thanks to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and its Chairman, Mr. Paul Badji, as well as to the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat and the Special Information Programme on the question of Palestine of the Secretariat's Department of Public Information. It is the hope of Syria that the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Special Information Programme will continue their work to create greater public awareness on the question of Palestine.

Unfortunately, Palestine continues in the third millennium to languish under Israeli occupation and continues to suffer from its policies of oppression, killing and destruction, despite all the efforts made by the Arab side to arrive at a comprehensive and just solution.

There have recently been noteworthy developments in the issue of Palestine, namely the implementation by Israel of a unilateral plan for the redeployment of its forces outside the Gaza Strip and the dismantling of its settlements and the evacuation of settlers. However, despite the fact that we welcome the withdrawal by Israel from any inch of Arab or Palestinian soil, Israel has recently taken measures towards the establishment of a buffer zone in the northern Gaza Strip that extends hundreds of metres into Palestinian land. Its forces continued to bombard many parts of the Gaza Strip, using aircraft, artillery

and tanks that have taken the lives of scores of innocent Palestinians.

Israel's persistent aggression against the Palestinian people and its resort to the most heinous forms of terror and oppression without regard to any political, legal or moral considerations confirm to us that it is not yet convinced of the necessity of establishing a comprehensive and just peace in the region. This is borne out by Israel's continued incursions into the towns and villages and the refugee camps in the occupied West Bank, as well as its continued acts of killing and assassination, the large-scale detention campaigns and the imposition of collective punishment against the Palestinian people. Moreover, Israel continues its settlement activities, the construction of the separation wall and the building of by-pass roads and military checkpoints that impede freedom of movement.

Despite the fact that Israel has evacuated its settlers from the Gaza Strip and from four settlements in the northern West Bank as a result of the heroic struggle and legendary determination of the Palestinian people, however, it has, in doing so, gravely misled world public opinion. It has continued to expand the settlements in the West Bank — the number of settlers now totals more than 260,000, more than 130,000 of whom live within 11 settlements in and around the city of East Jerusalem, occupied since 1967.

Israel has continued its blockade of the occupied city of Jerusalem and has prevented Palestinians from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip from reaching it. It has continued to isolate it from its Palestinian environment and to alter its cultural, demographic and geographic character. It has completed 130 kilometres, about 70 per cent, of the construction of the separation wall that surrounds the Holy City, which will contain almost 20 settlements, isolating 250,000 Palestinians from their natural geographic and demographic environment.

Israel has accelerated the construction of new parts of the infamous racist separation wall, resulting in the confiscation of thousands of dunums of Palestinian land, in contravention of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and General Assembly resolutions, and in total disregard for the positions of many countries, including those friendly towards Israel. As a result, a number of Palestinian villages and towns have been turned into isolated bantustans, surrounded by walls on all sides. In flagrant defiance of the United Nations and its resolutions, the Prime Minister of Israel recently declared that his Government intended to continue to build settlements in the West Bank and the Golan, as well as to complete the construction of the separation wall.

The expansion of the Israeli settlements has been accompanied by acts of violence and terrorism by Israeli settlers and the Israeli army against innocent Palestinians, in particular during the past five years. The recent Israeli escalation has dealt a real blow to peace efforts at all levels and has weakened our hopes for achieving substantive progress in the peace process.

When considering the question of Palestine and the reasons for the lack of a just and comprehensive solution to the situation in the Middle East, the overwhelming majority of United Nations Members must ask themselves the reason why the situation is as it is. The Security Council has adopted historic resolutions in this context, in particular resolution 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). However, Israel has refused to comply with the will of the international community. Some States have sought to implement arbitrary decisions that have absolutely no basis in international law against States in Africa and the Middle East, and the Arab side has accepted such decisions, despite their inherent injustice. Yet certain States members of the Security Council do not lift a finger to compel Israel to implement the Council's resolutions. That, unfortunately, is the sad reality.

What is the reason for the unstable situation in the Middle East and the continued tension and spiral into violence there? The true, honest answer is to be found in the scandalous double standards and lack of sincerity on the part of the protectors of Israel when it comes to implementing United Nations resolutions. Some of them do not even participate in the vote on the relevant draft resolutions in the General Assembly. That represents a true deviation from the logic of international legality.

The continued Arab-Israeli conflict, the ongoing occupation of the Arab lands in Palestine, Syria and Lebanon and the absence of any real prospects for peace continue to impede the region's progress towards political, economic and human development. Syria's position with regard to peace, and its frame of reference, has always been consistent and credible. We

look to the States Members of the United Nations to provide true support for the implementation of relevant United Nations resolutions leading to a compete Israeli withdrawal from the Syrian Golan and the Palestinian territories to the borders of 4 June 1967, as well as its withdrawal from the Lebanese Shaba'a farms.

President Bashar Al-Assad of the Syrian Arab Republic, in his historic statement of 10 November, reiterated his serious support for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, who was visiting Syria. He supported the Palestinian people's struggle for the restoration of their rights and promised to do everything he could in that regard.

The international community is unanimous in its belief that a just, comprehensive peace in the Middle East and the resolution of the question of Palestine — under consideration today — can be achieved only through the full implementation of internationally binding resolutions, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the Madrid terms of reference, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The Arab party to the peace process has consistently respected internationally binding resolutions and the terms of reference on the basis of which the peace process was established in 1991. At the same time, Israel has continued to resort to all kinds of deception and misleading ploys in order to distance itself from those terms of reference and to ignore the international will in order to both gain land and win peace. That has prevented the establishment of the desired comprehensive and just peace.

Israel is well aware that peace can be achieved only through the establishment of an independent Palestinian State on Palestinian territory, with its capital in Jerusalem, and the compete withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan and the remaining occupied Lebanese land. It is high time for the international community and the Security Council to take a firm position on Israel's policies so as to enable the Palestinian people to determine their future and establish an independent State on their land, with its capital in Jerusalem.

**Mr. Laurin** (Canada) (*spoke in French*): Last year during the debate on this item, in this very Hall, we spoke of a window of opportunity for the Middle East peace process and called on both parties to embrace the historic opportunity for real change in the lives of Israelis and Palestinians. Both sides have risen to the challenge, and it is critical for us in the international community to maintain and reinforce the momentum of those positive developments.

Israel has taken the historic step of withdrawing from Gaza and parts of the West Bank, and the Palestinian people have elected a leader committed to the process of political reform. Together, Palestinians and Israelis, with the support of the United States and the European Union, reached a vital border agreement that gives control of an international frontier to Palestinians for the first time. Those unprecedented events will foster economic activity in the Gaza Strip and improve the lives of ordinary Palestinians. Our discussion today on the question of Palestine within the context of those new realities will encourage a renewed sense of hope that the parties will, indeed, work for a lasting, comprehensive settlement of all issues.

It is not only in the region that we have seen some positive changes, but also here at the United Nations. Canada commends Israel's new engagement with the United Nations. We strongly supported Israel's vice-presidency of the General Assembly and welcome other breakthroughs achieved over the past year. In particular, Canada applauds Israel and its Permanent Representative for achieving consensus on the resolution entitled "Holocaust remembrance". Canada was proud to co-sponsor that resolution, along with 103 other countries.

At the same time, the Palestinian delegation has taken an approach that facilitates the negotiations regarding the draft resolutions they have submitted to the General Assembly this year. Draft resolutions have been modified to welcome Israel's withdrawal. In some instances, provocative language has been removed. We have worked very constructively with the Permanent Observer of Palestine. We applaud the proposal to withdraw the draft resolution on the situation of, and assistance to, Palestinian children. That is a step forward in reducing what we have long regarded as the excessive number of draft resolutions on the Middle East.

(*spoke in English*)

I want Canada's position on particular issues that arise here in the General Assembly to be seen in the context of our long-standing policy in the region. Canada has always been, and remains, wholly committed to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace

in the Middle East. We support Israel's right to live within secure borders, free from the threat of violence, conflict and terror. We also support an independent, viable, democratic and territorially contiguous Palestinian State living side-by-side in peace with its neighbours.

Canada has always strongly condemned all forms of violence and terror. Indeed, it is a widely accepted view that non-combatants should not be targeted by any means by any party to a conflict. We therefore firmly and unequivocally condemn any form of support, either direct or indirect, to terrorist organizations. The use of suicide bombings against innocent civilians is particularly abhorrent. No legitimate democratic State can ever be built through the use of terrorism. Terrorists and their supporters should immediately be brought to justice and their networks disarmed and dismantled.

Israel must also strive to build trust by refraining from unilateral actions that may prejudge the outcome of final status negotiations. Those include ensuring that the route of the security barrier does not stray from the 1967 border nor disrupt the livelihoods of Palestinian farmers working to secure a future for their families. While the withdrawal was a courageous step in the right direction, further efforts to negotiate borders should be achieved through negotiations. It is not a small point: when negotiations succeed, even in modest steps, they provide the strongest ammunition against violence.

Canada continues to look for new ways to support peacebuilding in the Middle East. We are proud to sponsor the Regional Forum for the Middle East Ministers of Justice, which is an initiative of Canada's Minister of Justice and Attorney General, and one that has been endorsed by the Palestinian Authority, Israel, Egypt and Jordan.

Canada continues to exercise custodianship and leadership in the process of seeking a just, viable and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian refugee issue.

We have increased financial and expert assistance to the Palestinian Authority to strengthen its capacity for internal reform and to build sustainable peace in the region. Canadian funds and expertise are contributing to such initiatives as building the capacity of a Palestinian border agency — which is critical to the management of safe borders — and to training programmes for Palestinian jurists. Yesterday, as a further indication of our commitment to a peaceful resolution, the Government of Canada announced its intention to establish a centre for peace and democracy in the Middle East.

In the context of those broad policy objectives and activities, let me now turn to the immediate business of the Assembly. Let me begin with the question that must be asked first of all: how can the work of the General Assembly be used to advance the objectives I have described? If the process here distracts from or undermines the effort to achieve those objectives, how can the General Assembly process be improved? In short, how can we here in New York hasten the day when the parties rise from the table following the successful negotiation of final status issues?

Last year, we announced that Canada would begin a process of reviewing its voting on the numerous Middle East draft resolutions that come before the General Assembly. While the fundamental elements of Canada's policy in the Middle East are unwavering, we believe this annual process in New York is becoming a diversion from the reality and real needs on the ground. It is divisive and unhelpful to the overall goal of strengthening dialogue and building confidence and trust among the parties. Countries, including Canada, invest time, energy and resources in analysing and negotiating draft resolutions; yet their ultimate value remains questionable. For that reason, Canada began last year to advocate more strongly for a reformed approach.

First, Canada has encouraged more constructive draft resolutions that reflect current dynamics and include mechanisms for follow-up on agreed benchmarks. To be credible and effective, draft resolutions should reflect and reinforce road map obligations.

Secondly, Canada has criticized inflammatory, provocative and divisive language in draft resolutions — language that creates a sense of imbalance and seems to suggest that it is only Israel that has obligations. The responsibilities of other actors, including Palestinians, are often not sufficiently emphasized, nor are references to Israeli security needs. Canada will not support draft resolutions that use emotive and provocative language in place of the facts.

Because of those concerns, Canada has become increasingly involved in text negotiations in order to work towards fewer, more focused and more balanced draft resolutions.

Among the many draft resolutions this year, Canada was pleased to be able to support the Fourth Committee's draft resolution on Israeli settlements. That is an issue of fundamental importance to Canada. Likewise, Canada will again be supporting the draft resolution before us now on Jerusalem.

Canada's position is that Jerusalem remains an issue for negotiation by the two sides and that Israel should desist from measures that pre-empt such negotiations and risk complicating a peaceful resolution. That includes measures such as the expansion of settlements within and around Jerusalem. Our support of both draft resolutions would not have been possible without the flexibility and openness shown by the Palestinian Observer Mission during those negotiations.

Last year Canada changed its vote on four of the annual Middle East draft resolutions so that they more closely reflect Canadian policy towards the Middle East. This year we have serious concerns with respect to three additional draft resolutions.

As we indicated last year when we voted against the draft resolution entitled "Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People" we believe scarce United Nations resources should be committed solely to bodies that can clearly demonstrate achievements in support of the peace process. In the same light, we have considered the work of the Secretariat's Division for Palestinian Rights, which supports the Committee, and have decided to vote against the draft resolution pertaining to its mandate. In our explanation of vote on last year's draft resolution, we indicated that we would vote against the draft resolution in the absence of demonstrable value having been added. We do not believe that has been achieved over the past year.

We have also raised concerns with its authors about the draft resolution entitled "Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine". While Canada strongly and unshakeably supports the premise of that draft resolution, we also believe that that broad draft resolution requires a stronger and more unequivocal condemnation of suicide bombings. That can be achieved by expressing such condemnation in a stand-alone paragraph. Such an explicit condemnation could help to end the use of terror throughout the region and beyond. We have heard no valid argument against that proposal. Accordingly, we will not be able to support the draft resolution without a stand-alone paragraph condemning suicide bombings.

Finally, Canada stated last year that it felt the draft resolution entitled "The Syrian Golan" unfairly placed the responsibility for renewed negotiations on Israel. While the reality is that confidence-building measures and good-will gestures are needed from both sides, we believe the language in that draft resolution is unbalanced and unhelpful to the overall goals of the peace process. Furthermore, we do not support the annual tabling of the draft resolution in plenary while every year the Assembly adopts a broadly supported draft resolution from the Fourth Committee on the Syrian Golan issue. For those reasons we will vote against the draft resolution.

I mentioned that Canada continues to seek new ways to build peace and dialogue among the parties in the Middle East. We find the process of these resolutions less than helpful in achieving the goal we all seek — peace in the Middle East — and we are of the view that the resolutions do not contribute to a balanced starting point, which is so critical to ensuring a successful outcome.

We will start the process of building the consensus necessary for an inclusive and thorough draft resolution on the peace process that is free of divisive rhetoric, accurate, detailed in approach and balanced in outcome. We will seek and welcome the support of all nations.

In doing this, we will be further assisting the continuing reform of the United Nations by helping to ensure a sharper focus on outcomes. By moving in that manner, we hope we can make the United Nations a key player in driving real change at this important time. We hope that all nations will engage with us towards that goal. We also hope in this way to improve the tone of the dialogue by reducing the politicization of the debate. That is our goal and the task that will drive Canada's work at the United Nations on that important region. We hope that all Member States will join with us in that endeavour.

**Mr. Assaf** (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): First, I would like to express my thanks and appreciation to the Secretary-General and to the Committee on the

Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for the two reports they have submitted to us under the agenda item, and for their efforts to achieve the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

The question of Palestine continues to be the most important and the oldest of the issues on the agenda of the United Nations, and the United Nations continues to be permanently responsible for the question of Palestine until it is resolved in all its aspects.

Our discussion on the question of Palestine this year leaves us with mixed feelings of hope and an awareness of the challenges that lie ahead. Israel's withdrawal on 12 July from the Gaza Strip constitutes a step in the right direction and strengthens our view that peace can be possible only when the will to make peace exists.

However, there are still many challenges to the achievement of all the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, as stipulated by General Assembly resolution 3236 (XXIX) of 1974, namely, the right to self-determination, the right to political independence and the refugees' right to return.

The most important of the challenges can be outlined as follows. First, Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip must be complete and comprehensive and should be the first step towards a complete withdrawal from the rest of the occupied Palestinian territories in the West Bank, an area comprising 5,800 square kilometres. One should keep in mind that Israel has not yet completed its pledge made at the 2005 Sharm el-Sheik Summit, because it ceded control of only two of the five cities in the West Bank that it pledged to hand over to the Palestinians.

Secondly, Israel still maintains 200 settlements in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem. The settlements are inhabited by about 400,000 settlers, an increase of 12,800 in the West Bank during the last year alone. At the beginning of 2005, Israel revealed a plan to construct 3,500 new residential units in the West Bank. That plan is another violation of Security Council resolution 465 (1980) which considers settlements illegal and as obstacles to peace.

Thirdly, Israel continues its construction of the separation wall, which extends 720 kilometres — 90 per cent of which is inside the West Bank, sometimes to a depth of 22 kilometres. The wall imposes a unilateral solution and when completed will lead to the absorption of about 1,000 square kilometres of West Bank territory. Needless to say, Israel's construction of the separation wall fundamentally violates and ignores the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice of 9 July 2004, which viewed the wall as illegal and called upon Israel to demolish it and to compensate the Palestinians for any damage it has caused.

Fourthly, the tragedy of the Palestinian refugees has existed for the past 57 years. Some 4.3 million Palestinian refugees are suffering and homeless in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria. Israel still rejects the return of the refugees to their homeland, in violation of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) and Security Council resolution 237 (1967).

Fifthly, Israel continues its aggression against Palestinian civilians, which has led to the deaths of approximately 4,000 Palestinians and the wounding of approximately 40,000 Palestinians, and has resulted in the arrest of 35,000 Palestinians since the beginning of the intifada in 2000. In that regard, we reiterate our support for General Assembly resolution 59/31 of 1 December 2004, on the need to treat civilians throughout the Middle East as neutrals and to condemn acts of violence committed against all civilians, including extrajudicial killings.

Lastly, we reaffirm our commitment to peace and to a solution based on the existence of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure borders recognized according to the 1949 Armistice Line, the land-for-peace principle and relevant United Nations resolutions, including Assembly resolution 194 (III) and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003) and the Arab Peace Initiative.

**Mr. Zhang** Yishan (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Since the beginning of this year, thanks to the efforts of the Palestinian and Israeli sides and to mediation by the international community, the Palestine-Israel situation has witnessed a relaxation rarely seen over the past four years and more. It is a commonly shared view that 2005 has been an opportune year for the Middle East peace process. We welcome the smooth transition of the Palestinian leadership, the two meetings between President Abbas and Prime Minister Sharon and the withdrawal of Israel from the Gaza Strip and part of the West Bank. These are all major

steps towards the settlement of the Palestine-Israel question.

Undoubtedly, there still exist differences between Palestine and Israel, and there are numerous difficulties facing the resumption of peace talks. To seize the opportunity and realize the hopes, leaders on both sides need to demonstrate political courage and wisdom and work together. Only when the parties concerned genuinely start to build mutual trust and implement the road map for peace in the Middle East can the final goal of peaceful coexistence between two independent States be achieved.

The question of Palestine is at the core of the Middle East question. We believe that the solution to the Palestinian issue lies in conducting political talks in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions and the principle of land for peace, and in building an independent Palestinian State based on the road map. This not only is in keeping with the fundamental interests of Palestine and Israel and of all other countries in the Middle East but would also facilitate the early attainment of peace and stability in the region. It should become a common goal for the international community and all parties concerned.

Peace between Palestine and Israel cannot be achieved without effective international support. We appreciate the positive efforts made by the Quartet and others to promote the Palestine-Israel peace process. We hope that even greater efforts will be made to push for early implementation of the road map by Palestine and Israel.

As an important organization for the maintenance of world peace and security, the United Nations too should effectively fulfil its responsibilities in this regard.

Syria-Israel and Lebanon-Israel talks are both important parts of the Middle East peace process. Comprehensive peace in the Middle East cannot be achieved without appropriate solutions to the Syria-Israel and Lebanon-Israel disputes. An early resumption of these two sets of talks and progress on the issue will help bring about comprehensive peace in the Middle East. We hope that the countries concerned will resume their talks at an early date and will seek mutually acceptable solutions in accordance with the principles set out at the Madrid Conference.

Recently, the situation in Lebanon and Israel has become the focus of attention. China wishes to express its condolences to the family of Mr. Rafik Hariri. We strongly condemn the bomb attack that took Mr. Hariri's life and support Mr. Detlev Mehlis in leading the International Independent Investigation Commission in its conduct of an independent and impartial investigation. We hope that the Commission will bring the truth to light at an early date so that justice is done on behalf of the victims. At the same time, in the process of conducting and completing the relevant investigations, full consideration should be given to the situation in that region, which involves many complex and interlinking elements, so as to avoid any new flare-ups of tension or turbulence.

China, like all others, has followed closely the situation in the Middle East throughout and has provided support to the Middle East peace process. In recent years, Chinese leaders and our Middle East special envoy have paid visits to the region on many occasions, with a view to seeking political solutions to the Middle East question. We will, as always, continue to work with all peace-loving forces and to play a constructive role in bringing about a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

**Mrs. Asmady** (Indonesia): The year 2005 has witnessed positive developments in the Middle East. In particular, the Sharm el-Sheikh summit in February, the London meeting in support of the Palestinian Authority the following month and the Israeli disengagement from the Gaza Strip and the northern part of the West Bank last August have kindled a glimmer of life in the peace process.

Despite those developments, however, at the same time the situation in the occupied territories has deteriorated. We are witnessing the intensified expansion of Israeli settlements in other parts of the West Bank, including in and around East Jerusalem, and an acceleration in the completion of the illegal wall built in the occupied Palestinian territory, which is clearly in contravention of Israel's obligations under the road map and a violation of international law. Moreover, it is being done with total disregard for the relevant advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. This undermines the positive momentum generated by the Gaza withdrawal and the understanding reached at Sharm el-Sheikh.

Meanwhile, at its sixty-first session, the Commission on Human Rights reaffirmed that the construction of the wall violates Israel's obligations under international human rights law, particularly with respect to the freedom of movement of Palestinians and their right to adequate housing, food, family life, education and health care.

While we recognize Israeli disengagement from Gaza as a positive step, my delegation would like to make its position clear: disengagement involves only a small fraction of the land Israel occupied in the 1967 war; therefore it should be accompanied by Israeli withdrawal from all remaining occupied lands. Furthermore, Israeli forces are still exercising control over the movements of people and over Gaza's borders, coastline and airspace, allowing Israel to launch incursions at will. Also, this disengagement has done little to improve the living conditions of Palestinians.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) continues to report difficulties in trying to deliver assistance to Palestinian refugees. The living conditions of the refugees have been severely affected by violence and by Israel's closures and its destruction of properties and livelihood. There is a general increase in food insecurity and a severe shortage of drinking water, as well as a decline in food consumption and nutritional levels. Israel's policies of continued violence against innocent civilians, internal and external closures and military incursions have aggravated the economic hardships of the Palestinian refugees.

The Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories has also been denied access by Israel to visit the occupied Palestinian territories. We are deeply disturbed by Israel's efforts to hinder the Special Committee's access to the needy and to information about objective conditions in the occupied Palestinian territories.

We are also deeply concerned that, according to the report of the Special Committee (*A/60/380*), 70 Palestinians have been shot dead by Israeli settlers since the second intifada. None of those settlers has been arrested and brought to justice by the Israeli authorities. Meanwhile, Israel continues to demand the right to protect its civilians from attacks by Palestinian militants.

The brutality of the Israel Defence Forces and attacks by Israeli settlers have together led to the death of 834 Palestinians, including 13 women and 165 children. It is therefore obvious that the Government of Israel must also stop the attacks by illegal Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians and that it must bring the perpetrators to justice.

Indonesia wishes to recall its support for the final document issued at the United Nations International Meeting on the Question of Palestine, held in Geneva on 8 and 9 March 2005, which called on the international community to adopt measures to persuade the Government of Israel to comply with international law and with the advisory opinion of International Court of Justice on the legal consequences of the construction of a wall in the occupied Palestinian territory, and called on the Quartet to redouble its efforts and to continue to work closely with the parties, together with other international and regional actors, to implement the road map in order to achieve a just and lasting settlement of the conflict.

As we are approaching the end of 2005 — which is the target time frame for the establishment of the State of Palestine under the terms of the road map — the international community must continue to put pressure on Israel to fully implement the road map. Israel must also be pressured to halt the construction of the wall, to comply with its obligation to protect civilians, to assist the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in delivering humanitarian assistance to Palestinian refugees, and to authorize the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories to visit the occupied Palestinian territories.

My delegation wishes to reiterate that the question of Palestine must be resolved in accordance with international law, especially Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), which guarantee the establishment of a sovereign, democratic, viable and contiguous Palestinian State living side by side in peace with a secure Israel. In that regard, my delegation calls on the international community to support the people of

Palestine in order to ensure the smooth conduct of free and fair parliamentary elections in January 2006.

In conclusion, my delegation reaffirms the permanent responsibility of the United Nations with regard to all aspects of the question of Palestine until it is resolved.

**Mr. Mabhongo** (South Africa): For once, there have been a number of positive changes in the Middle East, which may present yet another opportunity to revitalize the peace process. However, even those hopeful signs may not amount to much unless the international community becomes fully engaged in supporting the peace process.

Israel has taken a courageous step towards ending the occupation of Gaza by withdrawing its military forces and the illegal settlements from that area, as well as from parts of the northern West Bank. For its part, the Palestinian Authority has undertaken bold efforts to reform the Palestinian security services, to re-establish the rule of law in areas that were only recently vacated by the Israeli military and to prepare for fully inclusive and democratic legislative elections.

The Palestinian-Israeli negotiations that resulted in the reopening of the Rafah border crossing between Palestine and Egypt may be the beginning of a process of cooperation between the parties, which should definitely be fully encouraged. Yet South Africa remains concerned that these latest opportunities for peace in the Middle East may be squandered if decisive action is not taken to stop the construction of settlements on Palestinian lands and to halt and reverse the construction of the separation wall.

Sixteen months ago, the General Assembly adopted resolution ES-10/15 by an overwhelming margin. That resolution upheld the finding of the International Court of Justice that the Israeli separation wall is illegal and that Israel has an obligation to dismantle the wall and to make reparation for all damages caused by its construction. The international community committed itself to further action to bring an end to the illegal situation resulting from the construction of the wall and requested the Secretary-General to establish a register of damages incurred by Palestinians as a result of its construction.

The General Assembly acted because the United Nations has a permanent responsibility with regard to the question of Palestine until it is resolved in its entirety in accordance with the Charter, the relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and international humanitarian law. The Secretary-General, in paragraph 14 of his report (A/60/539), notes that Israel has "failed to make progress on the implementation of its core commitments under the road map". The Secretary-General further states in the same paragraph, "Government-sponsored settlement activity may have a negative impact on the territorial contiguity of Palestinian territory and thus remains a source of serious concern".

In another report, Mr. John Dugard, Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel since 1967, recalls that the international community has proclaimed the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the need to create a Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel. Yet, Mr. Dugard reports,

> "This vision is unattainable without a viable Palestinian territory. The construction of the wall, the expansion of settlements and the de-Palestinization of Jerusalem threaten the viability of a Palestinian State." (*A/60/271, summary*)

Mr. Dugard's conclusion is that the accelerated construction of the separation wall and the settlements, together with the exodus of non-Jews from East Jerusalem and other key parts of the occupied West Bank, are creating new facts on the ground in the Middle East. He concludes by arguing that "Israel has embarked upon major changes in Jerusalem in order to make the city more Jewish" (*Ibid.*).

The history of the peace process in the Middle East is that whenever there are positive indications, progress becomes threatened because the international community is slow to become fully engaged in supporting the peace process. We hope that during the sixtieth year since the founding of the United Nations, the international community will become even more committed to addressing the political issues underlying the situation in the Middle East. Humanitarian efforts are welcome, but their impact will remain limited unless the root causes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are addressed.

**Mr. Kitaoka** (Japan): The past year has been one of strong progress on the question of Palestine. The Sharm el-Sheikh commitment in February, Israel's disengagement from Gaza and part of the West Bank in

August and the Agreement on Movement and Access this month all represent significant accomplishments. Although there were periods in the intervals between one step and the next during which the momentum appeared to have been lost, the process as a whole was moved forward by the impact of each positive step following a period of stagnation.

The Sharm el-Sheikh commitment was significant because it was the product of restored confidence between the leaders of Israel and Palestine, realized through direct dialogue between them. Part of that commitment has, in fact, been implemented. Japan calls upon both parties to continue to steadily implement the measures to which they have committed, such as the handover of the security responsibility in three West Bank cities.

The Government of Israel conducted the Gaza withdrawal relatively peacefully and smoothly, with firm determination, in spite of domestic political opposition. It deserves renewed commendation. The Palestinian side, for its part, made positive efforts to maintain restraint in the actions of the various parties. We hope that the cooperation between the two parties seen on the ground at the time of the Gaza withdrawal will serve as a good precedent for future measures for peace.

The agreement on movement and access represents the culmination of the tireless efforts made by the Israeli Government, the Palestinian Authority and the international community. Japan appreciates those efforts, in particular the mediating role played by Mr. Wolfensohn and Secretary of State Rice. We welcome the reopening of the Rafah border crossing on 25 November. Assistance by the European Union, as well as efforts by both parties, will be critical. Japan deeply appreciates the EU's role in the achievement of this milestone.

The remaining items in the agreement are equally important for the reconstruction of Gaza and for the stabilization of civilian life there. We hope that the agreed measures concerning the Gaza-West Bank linkage and the Gaza seaport will be implemented promptly, and that consultations between both parties concerning the Gaza airport will speedily produce a constructive result.

There is one more important thing that the two parties must achieve over and above those accomplishments: a real return to the road map. For the Palestinian side, the first step would be reform, including security sector reform, and, for the Israeli side, the halting of all actions which could prejudge the result of final status negotiations, such as any expansion of settlement activities. Both parties need to demonstrate through action their commitment to the road map.

As long as the will for peace on the part of both parties is clear, the international community will never falter in its efforts to assist them in progressing towards peace. Japan, on the occasion of President Abbas's visit to Japan in May this year, announced an assistance package amounting to $100 million for the near future, mainly to support efforts to stabilize civilian life in Gaza and the West Bank. Allocation of the funds for approximately half of the package was authorized at the time of the Gaza withdrawal.

We will continue to extend political and economic support for the achievement of progress in the peace process. We hope that, through the elections in Israel and Palestine at the beginning of next year, both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples will clearly demonstrate their commitment to the road map, which is the only viable peace plan.

There has not been much progress in the past year on the Syrian track. However, only a comprehensive peace can be a lasting peace. As is true of the Palestinian track, provided the will for peace by the parties is clear, the international community will support efforts to achieve peace. Japan reiterates its call on the two parties to make efforts in that regard, fervently hoping that peace, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), will be realized as early as possible.

**Mr. Kapoma** (Zambia): Once again, as at previous sessions of the General Assembly, we are called upon to discuss the important question of peace and security in the Middle East. The question of Palestine has been before the Assembly for the past 60 years and is therefore an issue which all Member States follow with keen interest. My delegation wishes to thank the Secretary-General for his incisive reports on the subject under consideration, contained in documents A/60/539 and A/60/35.

Zambia welcomes the recent developments that have taken place with regard to some aspects of the Middle East peace process. After 38 years of restrictions, the Palestinian people are today able to

cross freely at least from the Gaza Strip into the neighbouring Arab Republic of Egypt. We also welcome the Israeli disengagement from the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank. It is the view of my delegation that these positive and welcome developments are long overdue. Nevertheless, the State of Israel should be encouraged to build on these positive steps to achieve lasting peace in that troubled region.

As Member States are aware, the Assembly has in the past demanded, through its resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), that Israel withdraw from all occupied Arab territories acquired by conquest through the 1967 and 1973 wars.

A sovereign and independent Palestine, living in peace and security side by side with Israel and its other neighbours, remains the ultimate objective of the Middle East peace process. The way forward is therefore for the international community to continue to impress upon the parties the need to fully implement the Quartet-sponsored road map, which has been endorsed by the Security Council. My delegation calls upon the parties to the peace process, namely, the Palestinians and the Israelis, to take bold steps towards achieving the desired objectives. Given the complex nature of the peace process, the Secretary-General is urged to continue to spearhead the efforts of the international community to ensure the full fruition of the peace process.

It is clear, as indicated by recent developments, that both parties to the conflict are committed to seeking an acceptable resolution. However, there are still some outstanding issues that need urgent attention. One such issue is the construction of a separation wall by the State of Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories. The construction of the wall represents not only an obstacle to peace but also a violation of the principles of international law, including humanitarian and human rights law.

My delegation holds the view that flexibility on this issue on the part of the State of Israel would greatly facilitate an early compromise that would contribute to addressing its own security concerns and thus help in reaching a satisfactory solution to the lengthy conflict in the Middle East.

My delegation is hopeful that, with the necessary commitment and determination of all concerned, a final solution to the question of Palestine will be possible in the near future. However, it will require courage, compromise and skill on the part of the leaders of the peoples of Israel and Palestine.

In conclusion, my Government fully supports the road map for the Middle East peace process and is confident that, with the necessary political will, a lasting solution will be achieved. Zambia looks forward to the early participation of the State of Palestine, as a full Member, in the deliberations of the United Nations.

**Mr. Bodini** (San Marino): I am taking the floor today to present the position of my Government on the question of Palestine.

San Marino traditionally supports respect for all cultures and countries. It has always encouraged all efforts towards the peaceful coexistence of peoples and has always firmly rejected provocations, violence and oppression of any kind.

San Marino would like to express its solidarity with the peoples of Israel and Palestine — who both treasure an old and noble history — and strongly supports the road map's objectives.

The history of San Marino is imbued with the search for peace and friendly cooperation among all peoples and the rejection of the logic of war and incitement to violence and conflict. Our country therefore condemns terrorism of any kind and any justification of terrorist behaviour.

San Marino commends Prime Minister Sharon for his political courage and steady commitment to disengagement and President Abbas for his tough stance towards terrorist groups and for pursuing a solution through peaceful negotiations.

Our country hopes that Israel and Palestine will continue their effort to implement the goals of the road map. We believe that the existence of two States living side by side in peace is highly desirable and, more important, possible. It is therefore necessary, at such a difficult moment in history, for countries and international organizations to reject threats and blackmail, working instead to encourage all steps towards recognition of the responsibility that every country has towards the rest of the world.

Now more than ever, the world needs stability, peace and security. In September, our heads of State and Government decided to act upon those goals and

involve our Governments and institutions in the renewed affirmation of the universal meaning of the principles in the Charter of the United Nations. San Marino honours that call and expresses its commitment to peace and understanding among all peoples.

**Ms. Al-Mulla** (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): The General Assembly's consideration of this agenda item is most important, given its close relationship to international peace and security. The Middle East, in particular Palestine, has not enjoyed stability for many decades, in spite of the region's vitality and importance. This is due to the wars that the region has suffered, which have exhausted its energies and resources. The most serious problems the region faces are Israel's continued pursuit of illegal policies and practices and its refusal to respond to peace initiatives.

Kuwait is following the tragic situation of the Palestinian people and the occupied Arab territories with great concern. The continuing deterioration of their living standards and their socio-economic situation is the result of Israeli practices that violate international laws and humanitarian laws and norms, including continued arrests and oppression, the shooting of unarmed civilians, the demolitions of homes, land confiscation, the siege of Palestinian cities and the assassination of Palestinian political and other leaders. In that context, we call upon Israel to respect the understandings reached at the Sharm el-Sheikh meeting of February 2005, which called for an end to violence.

The State of Kuwait reaffirms its full support for the struggle of the Palestinian people to achieve all their legitimate political rights. It calls on the Government of Israel to comply with the obligations and resolutions of international legitimacy, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), as well as the principle of land for peace and the bilateral agreements signed between the Palestinian Authority and Israel within the framework of the peace process.

We call for the implementation of all provisions and requirements of the road map. We call on Israel to end the policies of siege and starvation, its repeated and continued military raids and incursions into areas under the control of the Palestinian Authority, the destruction of infrastructure and settlement construction. We call for the release of all Palestinian prisoners and detainees, respect for the sanctity of holy sites, including the protection of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, and the preservation of the Arab identity of the city of Jerusalem, as we denounce all Israeli policies and measures intended to Judaize and annex the city.

Israel's continued construction of the separation wall is a flagrant violation of international law, including international humanitarian and human rights laws. Israel has not complied with the 9 July 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, which ruled that the separation wall constitutes a violation of the resolutions of international legitimacy. The Court's advisory opinion called on Israel to demolish the wall and compensate Palestinians who have sustained losses as a result of its construction. That construction also demonstrates a lack of respect for the will of the international community as reflected in Assembly resolution ES-10/15 of 20 July 2004.

Kuwait considers Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and the northern West Bank to be the first of a series of steps that must be taken to end the occupation, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, and that will lead to the establishment of an independent Palestinian State on Palestinian national soil, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

The recent agreement on the Rafah border crossing can be considered an indicator of the progress achieved. However, further progress is necessary, in particular the opening of the Gaza airport and seaport and freedom of movement both between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and within the West Bank.

Kuwait hopes that the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip will help revive peace efforts in the region, leading to Israel's full withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan to the 4 June 1967 borders and its compliance with relevant Security Council resolutions, while affirming the illegality of current Israeli activities in the occupied Golan.

With regard to the concerns of our brothers in Lebanon, Kuwait continues to extend its full support for all their just demands. We call upon Israel to cease its continuing threats against Lebanon and to respect that country's sovereignty.

In conclusion, we would like to reiterate that comprehensive, lasting and just peace will not be achieved as long as Israel's occupation of Arab lands since 1967 continues. We would also like to reiterate

the support and commitment of the State of Kuwait for the Arab peace initiative, adopted at the Beirut summit of the League of Arab States, as one of the main pillars of the peace process. In that regard, we wish to express our appreciation for the efforts by the Quartet to lead the region towards the security and stability desired by all. The Government of Israel must realize that achieving security is an overarching desire and the right of all peoples and States of the region — not just Israel.

**Mrs. Núñez de Odremán** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): On 10 November 1975, the General Assembly adopted resolution 3376 (XXX), which established the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. The Committee is charged with recommending a programme aimed at enabling the Palestinian people to exercise its inalienable rights. We therefore commend the noble and significant humanitarian work of this Committee, which is grounded in the fundamental principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

We feel honoured to have been admitted as an observer member of the Committee on 11 November 2003. We are similarly honoured and proud to be this year's host country to the meeting in the Latin American and Caribbean region of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, which will be held in Caracas from 13 to 15 December.

We are convinced that it is necessary for the maintenance of international peace and security that, ideologies aside, relations among States adhere strictly to the Charter of the United Nations and the accepted fundamental principles and norms of international relations. Especially relevant in that regard is the prohibition of the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State, non-intervention and non-interference in the internal and external affairs of States and peoples or their natural resources, and the self-determination and independence of peoples under colonial and neo-colonial domination, foreign occupation or racist regimes.

We are convinced that sovereignty is the exclusive purview of peoples, and that the destiny of the Palestinian people can only be determined by that people itself. We are also convinced that, in order for violence to end on both Israeli and Palestinian territory, Palestinians must be given full control over their land. There can be no peace while occupation continues, for occupation will always be rejected by peoples.

We believe that a comprehensive, just and lasting resolution of the Palestinian issue, which is at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict, must be based on the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, including the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, which has been supported by the General Assembly, regarding the construction of Israel's wall on occupied Palestinian territory. It must also be based on the following fundamental principles: Israel's withdrawal from Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem and other occupied Arab territories; respect for the right of all States of the region to live in peace, without any sort of intervention and within internationally recognized borders; and lastly, recognition of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, especially the right to self-determination.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela favours a comprehensive and peaceful settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We hope that negotiations to that end will be carried out in circumstances that ensure effective self-determination for the Palestinian people.

I should like to conclude by sharing with the Assembly a story by Saint Augustine, as cited by Noam Chomsky. Saint Augustine tells of a pirate captured by Alexander the Great. Alexander asks how he dares to disturb the seas. The pirate replies by asking how Alexander dares to trouble the entire world. "I have a small boat," says the pirate, "and for that I am called a thief. You have an entire fleet; for that you are called an emperor."

**Mr. Dabbashi** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me, at the outset, to express my delegation's appreciation for the work of the Special Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Right of the Palestinian People. We would like to commend the efforts the Committee has made since its establishment to carry out the task entrusted to it by the international community.

We are once again considering the question of Palestine. Most of us have expressed our disappointment at the United Nations for its failure in the course of 58 years to produce a comprehensive, just and lasting resolution that ensures the legitimate and inalienable rights of Palestinians, namely, their right to

return to their homes, their right to self-determination and their right to establish an independent State over their entire territory.

What is the cause of that dismal failure? The answer is in fact simple and clear. In the course of the past decades, all of us have taken note of how the Security Council deals with the Israeli entity, which has usurped Palestinian territory and scattered its people to every corner of the world. It has denied Palestinians the right to return and endeavours in every way — with the support of its allies — to alter the history, geography and even the cultural identity of the region.

The Security Council has dealt with the occupation authorities as if they were above the law and beyond reproach. All possible pressure has been brought to bear on the Palestinians to accept the fait accompli created by that entity and to abandon their demand for the recovery of their land and their struggle for that recovery.

The Israeli entity has exploited the international environment prevailing since 11 September 2001 to brand the struggle of Palestinians as terrorism. The Palestinian people are merely striving to end occupation and to restore their rights. Their struggle is legitimate and is supported by international law and norms.

Here we cannot but express our regret at the fact that a number of States that struggled against Nazism, supported the liberation movements and fought the Nazi occupation have now completely adopted the Israeli viewpoint, support the Israeli occupation and are attempting to provide justifications for the crimes perpetrated against the Palestinian people, which are no less cruel or heinous than those committed by the Nazis.

United Nations bodies, and in particular the Security Council, must put an end to such double standards. The General Assembly must strive to achieve a genuine reform of the Security Council that would ensure the abolition of the veto power, or at least its restriction, so that General Assembly resolutions do not remain a dead letter, and to ensure that international law ceases to be a law of the powerful that is interpreted according to their every whim and interest.

With respect to international law, all necessary measures must be taken to compel the Israeli entity to implement the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice handed down on 9 July 2004 concerning the construction of the separation wall in the Palestinian territories. That advisory opinion was reaffirmed by the General Assembly during its emergency special session in resolution ES-10/15, adopted on 20 July 2004.

Many plans have been elaborated over the last few decades aimed at resolving the question of Palestine, the most recent of which is the Quartet's road map. However, we have not seen any tangible progress towards the desired objective because the Quartet has left everything up to the occupying Power. It does not put forward any initiatives but always waits for Israeli acts of propaganda and then responds to them as if they were genuine initiatives.

Any progress towards a just and comprehensive solution must be based on international law and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. On 22 September 2005, during the general debate, our Secretary of the General People's Committee for Foreign Liaison and International Cooperation said:

> "We believe that the solution cannot be achieved by accepting a de facto situation or by merely adopting resolutions or unrealizable plans. It will happen through a radical solution that allows and guarantees the return of all Palestinian refugees to their lands and the establishment of a democratic State on the land of historical Palestine in which Jews and Arabs live side by side, enjoying full equality, similar to the South African model, where blacks and whites reconciled after decades of conflict and bloodshed. If such a solution is not realized, with the support of the international community, the suffering of the Palestinian people will continue, and the region will continue to witness tension and conflict without peace and security." *(A/60/PV.21, pp. 3-4)*

The Middle East region will not enjoy peace or security until the international community arrives at a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine and brings about the full withdrawal of the Israeli occupation forces from the Syrian Golan Heights and the Lebanese Shaba'a farms.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): I should like inform members that, immediately following the debate on agenda items 14, "The situation in the Middle East", and 15, "Question of Palestine", the General Assembly will take action on draft resolutions A/60/L.28 through A/60/L.31.

*The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.*